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Poems: In the Region of Words

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poems: in the region of words

One of Oregon's longest running poetry quarterlies, *fireweed*, features regional writers, many of whom live in and write about the metroscape. Now 12 years old, *fireweed* is living up to its name and growing into its place. It takes a tough weed like *epilobium angustifolium* to grow first after forest fires; *fireweed* magazine embodies its namesake's toughness and sense of place. The selections reprinted here capture moods and moments familiar to our region.

For more information about *fireweed*, contact the editors at 5204 N. Gay Avenue, Portland, Oregon, 97217.

Dan Raphael

Grazing the elements

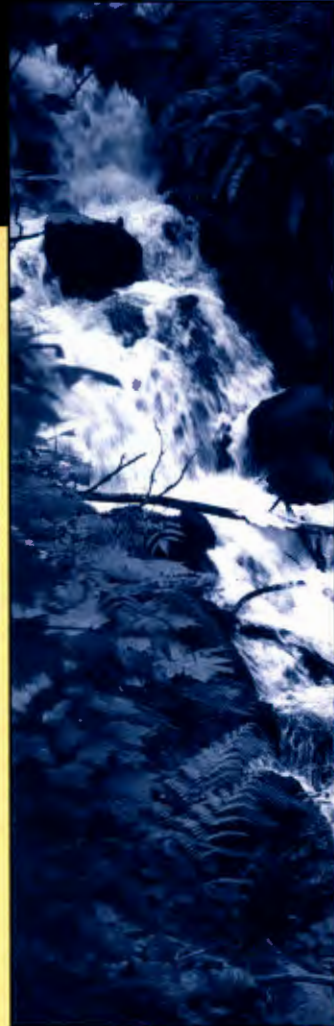
A bowl full of deep water that can't be lifted –
i didn't know our house went so far down, with a walk-in china closet
as each meal is comprehensive:

everything the greens & carrots
read with their roots, the potatoes immersion theatre
as if the local park's not an extinct volcano
but a patient mound of tubers sharing news with the rainflow

feedlot cows have so little to say – quonset fryers even less –
with no vistas to experience, eating what's mono-cropped pelletized
and as edited & steam-cleaned by additives as the network news.
yet to eat the chicken who'd patrolled your yard for months in all weathers
eating last year's corn, now's grass and insects;
or the cow who's tongued every corner of the back 40.

hunters think they enjoy the hunt but it's information they're after,
the lore of the forest too compelling to resist, yet too foreign
for a primitive to unscroll:

i don't drink through my mouth
only by soaking in a river or fresh tub.
i eat soil and sunshine, treasuring eggs and grubs,
standing naked in a windy gully 'til i'm too full to dress



Carlos Reyes

In the Fall

I walk the dangerous edge
of damp graveled roads
the perimeter of the aging forests
the changing leaves
the gold instead of green
twirling in a colder wind

How I enjoy it
the smell of wild apples
beginning to turn to cider
a bitter frost and crabapples
like dim lanterns
a china pheasant popping
from beneath my feet
to wake me from my revery

I enjoy the hope
for one more day
before the final rains arrive
to walk down the leafy lane
yet hoping for a break
in the clouds, to see bright
sun once more

before winter tightens
its jaws around the trees
before the grey pulling
clouds suffocate the wind
before the lake, rivers and sea
fall from the heavens
drowning every green thing
before the final fading

all green all gold
to dull to papery pale

Alicia Beale

At Lunchtime

*Clouds bug by overhead, searching for shore,
It's a cool afternoon in a month of dark dreams,
navy suits and gray dresses follow one another
like schools of fish along the river path,
already caught in the current's cold reality.
Even lovers walk slow, watch
for a pace to drown themselves out of serenity.*

*Ignoring the damp grass, I sit alone.
The wind dances with debris then takes up the feel
of an oncoming storm. With each gust,
my body rocks, tethered to the ground but
acknowledging the yield and pull of blue sky.
When did I become bored with
sailboats, cumulus clouds, spring days?*

*What world was it, that no longer exists?
As if it were a seagull waiting for dead fish
to rise up from the ocean like offerings,
I perch the book on my knees. Across white pages,
words form a net, only nothing swims
out from the spine. It's only me that's captured,
drowning, doing the dead man's float.*

Judith Barrington

What She Said

And then she told me everything was dead
or lost.
The dog was important but not because it had been with
her for long:
a few weeks ago she'd handed it some fries and coke.
It had stayed.
And while she said it, she turned away her face to hide
her pleasure.

And then she told me no one had talked to her since
New Year's Eve
and only then because people were out on the street,
singing and drunk.
They talked to her but it wasn't what she would call
conversation, she said.
They puked a lot and cried a bit and thought they had
it bad.

She didn't mind the solitude. It was better than living
at home
where her father couldn't be stopped and one of her
brothers tried it too.
The cold was bad though – cold like she'd never imagined
in her life:
last week she'd almost killed a man, just for his quilted
coat.

Her mom had done her best – she stated it loudly, several
times.
She didn't want me to think that her mother was
negligent, she said.
Yes, negligent's the word she used; I noticed it right
away.
She'd been in school a while and could've been a poet I
thought,
but first she skipped to get a job and later she worked
the streets,
and before she turned sixteen she quit and moved in
under the bridge.
At the weekend market she sat on the ground and
chalked mandala designs
with an upturned cap beside her and some water in a
mug.

Sunday nights, she ate fries and coke – it was a Sunday the
dog had come-
and dropped by her mom's with the change from the cap,
but rarely hung around.
She needed dogfood; I gave her some money and left,
and when I looked back
the dog was resting its chin on her thigh, one muddy ear
cocked high.

